

Staff Department  
THE INFANTRY SCHOOL  
Fort Benning, Georgia

ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE  
1949-1950

THE OPERATIONS OF THE 5307TH COMPOSITE UNIT  
(PROVISIONAL) "MERRILL'S MARAUDERS," AT  
WALAWBUM, BURMA, 2-7 MARCH 1944  
(INDIA-BURMA CAMPAIGN)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY REGIMENT ATTACKING  
A VILLAGE IN JUNGLE TERRAIN

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ADD MICROFILM

ITEM NO: 3564

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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 5307TH COMPOSITE UNIT  
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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 5307th Composite Unit (Provisional) on its first mission, the attack on WALAWBUM, BURMA, 2-7 March 1944.

To orient the reader, it is necessary to briefly review the major events which led up to this action.

In January 1942, after overrunning nearly all of southeast Asia, the Japanese struck at Burma. In rapid succession, the Japanese took the city of MOULMEIN, the port of RANGOON, the rail heads of MANDALAY, and MYITKYINA and the BURMA ROAD. (See Map A)

The enemy's rapid advance and numerical superiority proved too great for the Allies and all resistance crumbled. A general withdrawal was effected and the Allies retreated west into India and northeast into China. By midsummer of 1943 the Japanese had consolidated their gains and were in complete control of all but a small wedge of territory in northwest BURMA. This now placed the enemy in the singular position of threatening the exposed eastern border of India as well as cutting the Chinese land supply routes. All attempts by the Allies to alter this situation had been unsuccessful. (1) (2) (3) (4) (See Map A)

At the Quebec Conference in August 1943 the Combined Chiefs of Staff decided that an Allied offensive was necessary to

- (1) A-9, p. 11-14, 19
- (2) A-14, p. 4
- (3) A-7, p. 40
- (4) A-18, p. 5

regain control of Burma and open the land routes to China. At the Cairo Conference of November 1943 it was agreed that the offensive would start in the early spring of 1944. (5) (6)

Southeast Asia Command planned to conduct the offensive in the following manner: (1) American and Chinese forces in India were to launch the first phase of this offensive from the vicinity of LEDO, INDIA. This force was to proceed to MYITKYINA and NAMHKAM. (2) British forces were to strike from the eastern border of India in the general direction of LASHIO and MANDALAY to secure the railheads located in this area. (3) The Chinese Armies in China were to advance from the province of YUNNAN in west China in the direction of NAMHKAM and MYITKYINA. They were to meet the Allied forces striking from the direction of LEDO and clear the BURMA ROAD. (See Map B)

By the winter of 1943 the Allies were engaged in assembling and training troops in preparation for the spring offensive. (7) (8)

#### THE GENERAL SITUATION

In December 1943, Headquarters China-Burma-India Theatre planned to launch the first phase of the Allied offensive.

The plan called for a main body of two divisions (22d and 38th Chinese) to advance generally astride the KAMAING Road in the direction of MYITKINA and NAMHKAM. This main body was to be preceded by an American long range penetration unit. The American unit (5307th Composite Unit (Provisional)) was to operate in advance of the main body and by a series of encircling

- (5) A-10, p. 242
- (6) A-23, p. 57
- (7) A-10, p. 108, 109, 268-273
- (8) A-17, p. 97

movements attack designated strong points along the route to MYITKINA. At MYITKINA it was planned that the Chinese Armies striking from China would join the 22d and 38th Chinese Divisions thus relieving the 5307th Composite Unit (Provisional). This operation was to be closely followed by engineers who were to construct a road through the area secured. This road was to provide a land route that would link with the LEDO railhead and break the Japanese land blockade of China. (See Map C) (9) (10)

This plan as it pertained to the joint effect of the 5307th Composite Unit (Provisional) and the two Chinese Divisions was divided into three main phases: (1) Capture of MAINGKWAN and WALAWBUM; (2) taking of SHADZUP and INKANGAHTAWNY; (3) seizure of MYITKYINA. (11)

The 5307th Composite Unit (Provisional) was formed especially to participate in this operation. It was composed of volunteers from the Zone of the Interior, Southwest Pacific Theater and the Caribbean Defense Command. These volunteers arrived in India on 1 October 1943 and were immediately rushed into special training in northeastern India designed to prepare them for their mission. The unit completed training in January 1946 and by 24 February joined the 22d and 38th Chinese Divisions at NINGBYEN. (See Map D) (12)

The main body of the attacking force, the Chinese 22d and 38th Divisions were American trained. They had been engaged in action against the Japanese since early December 1944 and were on 24 February in the vicinity of TAIPHA GA. (See Map D) (13) (14) (15)

- (9) A-10, p. 268, 269
- (10) A-17, p. 7, 8
- (11) A-17, p. 31, 47, 93
- (12) A-17, p. 8-10, 24
- (13) A-10, p. 266
- (14) A-11, p. 24
- (15) A-10, p. 273

Enemy forces composed of elements of the Japanese 18th Division were disposed generally along the KAMAING Road. The combat efficiency of this division was regarded as high. It enjoyed strong positions throughout the valley and was well entrenched. It was a veteran organization that had fought at Singapore and had had considerable experience in jungle combat. (16)

At this time "Merrill's Marauders" possessed a potentially high combat efficiency. The men were well trained, physically prepared for the operation and many were jungle combat veterans. The combat efficiency of the 22d and 38th Chinese Divisions was especially good, although they were yet to prove that they could effectively participate in offensive warfare. (17) (18)

The HUWKAUNG VALLEY, in which this action took place, is a comparatively narrow corridor. It is blocked to the north by the 20,000 foot Himalaya Mountains, to the west by a long ridge of mountains reaching 10,000 feet and on the east by the KUMON Range which reaches an elevation of 10,000 feet. (See Map C) (19)

The valley floor is indented with many small streams and rivers. The vegetation consists mainly of large trees and dense undergrowth. The so-called open spaces are thick with knife-sharp elephant grass. (20)

Travel across this rugged terrain is made more difficult by the almost total absence of roads suited to motor traffic. The KAMAING Road capable of supporting military vehicles was little more than a wide trail. This road was held by the enemy. Therefore, all normal movement was restricted to narrow foot trails. To further add to the isolation of the area was the absence of

- (16) A-11, p. 27
- (17) A-1, p. 160
- (18) A-18, p. 5, 6
- (19) A-19, p. 2
- (20) A-17, p. 18



true villages (most villages as they appear on a map might indicate some size but in reality possess only a few huts.) (21)

Insofar as the health of the individual soldier is concerned, the hot, humid climate was a constant hazard. During the monsoon season the valley floods. This flooding produces the dampness and water pockets which combine to create ideal breeding places for the malarial mosquitoes found throughout the area. In addition to malaria, the valley is host to a multitude of infections including dysentery, scrub typhus and jungle sores. (22) (23) (24) (25)

Weather during the initial phase of the operation would be favorable since the offensive would start during the dry season. Rain was not anticipated until the beginning of the monsoon season in late May or June. (26)

Logistically, the operation was not to be well supported. This is best explained by the then Chief of Staff, War Department (now Department of the Army), General George C. Marshall, who wrote: "He (General Stilwell) was out at the end of the thinnest supply line of all, the demands of the war in Europe and the Pacific Campaign which were clearly more vital to final victory exceeded our resources." (27) (28)

#### DISPOSITION AND PLAN OF HEADQUARTERS CHINA-BURMA-INDIA THEATRE

On 24 February 1944, the forward command post of the Headquarters China-Burma-India Theatre was located on the KAMAING Road in the vicinity of TAIPHA GA. The plan of this headquarters for the capture of WALAWBUM called for the 22d and 38th Chinese

- (21) A-17, p. 20
- (22) A-10, p. 270
- (23) A-8, p. 18
- (24) A-1, p. 8, 9
- (25) A-6, p. 6, 7
- (26) A-6, p. 4
- (27) A-1, p. 160
- (28) A-20, p. 75

Divisions to execute a frontal attack on MAINGKWAN. The 5307th Composite Unit (Provisional) was to penetrate enemy positions from the left and strike directly at the objective. (See Map D) (29)

The "Marauders" were to sever the enemy main supply route (KAMAING Road) at the objective and destroy a command post believed in the vicinity. The movement to the rear of the enemy front lines was to be rapid and secret. They were not to attack the objective until ordered by the Commander, China-Burma-India Theater, General Joseph Stilwell. This order was to be given when an attack by the "Marauders" could facilitate the advance of the 22d and 38th Divisions and was to be coordinated with this advance. (30) (31) (32)

By 24 February the Chinese 22d and 38th Divisions had secured the road from LEDO and were forward of TAIPHA GA attacking in the direction of MAINGKWAN. "Merrill's Marauders" had departed NINGBYEN and were moving rapidly by trail, approximately 10 miles to the north of the Chinese, in the direction of <sup>TANJA GA (?)</sup> TAIPHA GA.

(See Map D)

#### THE 5307TH COMPOSITE UNIT (PROVISIONAL) SITUATION

When the 5307th arrived in LEDO, INDIA on 8 February it was organized for combat as follows: Three battalions each composed of two combat teams. Each combat team had as its basic elements about one and one half rifle companies, one heavy weapons company and an Intelligence and Reconnaissance platoon, in addition the unit had a Headquarters Platoon, Pioneer and Demolition Platoon and a Medical Section. (See Annex 1 -- Organization Chart) (33)

- (29) A-11, p. 27
- (30) A-10, p. 268-273
- (31) A-18, p. 31, 32
- (32) A-11, p. 28, 29
- (33) A-11, p. 14, 15

From LEDO the unit made a foot march of approximately 150 miles. The last 50 miles was made in enemy territory over narrow, leech-infested trails. The entire march was accomplished in about 17 days, including a two-day rest at NINGBYEN. On 2 March the unit had penetrated 30 miles behind the enemy's front lines and were within 15 miles of the objective on the north bank of the TANAI River at the WALAWBUM Trail crossing. (See Maps C and D) (34) (35) (36) (37)

Due to the rapid advance of the 22d and 38th Chinese Divisions and the nature of the terrain this position was both their final assembly area and line of departure. (See Map D) (38) (39)

Several men, too sick to move forward with the unit, were left with the Kachines, friendly Native tribesmen, at NHTEN. One scout had been killed. The total strength of the unit was about 2,746. In spite of the arduous march, the strain of constant alertness and several minor encounters with the enemy, morale was good and spirits were high. This spirit is attributed both to the specialized nature of their training, which had prepared them for this type of operation, as well as the volunteer nature of the unit. (40) (41) (42)

The terrain in the zone over which the 5307th was to operate was true jungle. A thick, almost impenetrable maze of bamboo, vines, trees, and dense, dank underbrush screened the objective. This mass of heavy vegetation blocking the approach was made more difficult by four streams running generally parallel to the TANAI

- (34) A-12, p. 23-36
- (35) A-18, p. 16
- (36) A-19, p. 4, 7
- (37) A-16, p. 28
- (38) A-12, p. 33, 35
- (39) A-18, p. 32, 33
- (40) A-12, p. 31, 34
- (41) A-18, p. 45
- (42) A-19, p. 5

River. One narrow trail, which forked at SANA GA, lead to WESU GA, LAGANG GA and WALAWBUM, was the only open path from the final assembly area. While the terrain was rough, it was relatively level except for a small knoll just north of WALAWBUM on the west side of the NUMPYEK River and the high ground on the east bank of the river east of the objective. (See Map D) (43) (44)

Enemy elements, thought to be the 55th and 56th Regiments of the 18th Division, were believed to be located between MAINCKWAN and WALAWBUM along the KAMAING Road, scattered generally east and west. On the march from NINGBYEN the "Marauders" had contacted isolated outposts and patrols along the trail. WALAWBUM was known to be a base of enemy operations although the exact strength was unknown. (45) (46) (47)

Rain posed no problem for this was the dry season. However, a considerable rise in temperature and humidity added to the fatigue and discomfort of the men. This rise in the moisture content of the air increased the burden of keeping weapons free of rust and in operating condition. (48)

The 5307th was totally dependent upon air drop for their supplies. On the ground, their own and the backs of pack mules provided the only means of transport. Cargo planes were to bring in all their ammunition, food and equipment and liaison planes were to evacuate the sick and wounded. Air supply was possible because of the air superiority achieved by the Tenth Air Force and necessary due to the distance from the base of supply, the absence of roads and the mobile nature of the organization. To

(43) A-18, p. 18, 36

(44) A-12, p. 35

(45) A-12, p. 27, 28

(46) A-18, p. 31

(47) A-16, p. 28

(48) A-18, p. 21

secure vital air drop zones an elaborate and efficient standard operating procedure was used on the march and in the combat zone. (See Annex 2 -- Air Drop SOP) (49) (50) (51)

#### THE 5307TH PLAN OF ATTACK

The line of departure was to be approximately one and one half miles from the south bank of the TANAI River. H-Hour varied with each battalion. The 3d Battalion was to move out at 021600 March, while the 2d and 1st Battalions were to follow at approximately 0100 on 3 March. (See Map E)

The 3d Battalion was to move south to the objective by way of SABA GA, and LAGANG GA, and was to seize and hold the high ground on the east bank of the NAMBYU River overlooking WALAWBUM. From positions on this high ground the 3d Battalion was to prevent an enemy withdrawal from WALAWBUM by covering the KAMAING ROAD with machine gun and mortar fire. (See Map E)

The 2d Battalion was to proceed south along the trail to WESU GA, cut a trail southwest to a point two and a half miles from WALAWBUM on the KAMAING Road, and to build and hold a road block at this point to prevent the flow of reinforcements and supplies to the enemy engaged by the Chinese 22d and 38th Divisions in the vicinity of MAINGWAN. (See Map E)

The 1st Battalion in reserve had the mission of building road blocks at SANA GA and <sup>SP?</sup>NICHET GA, and holding them with one platoon at each. The purpose of this mission was to prevent enemy elements known to be north of the TANAI River from moving south to reinforce WALAWBUM and to prevent attack from the rear. The remainder of one combat team was to set up combat patrols

- (49) A-19, p. 6
- (50) A-12, p. 32, 33
- (51) A-17, p. 7

west of WALAWBUM between SHIMAK GA, and UGA GA to protect the right flank of the forward elements. One combat team was to be held near WESU GA, prepared to be committed upon order. (See Map E) (52) (53)

The 5307th Composite Unit (Provisional) was to hold these positions until relieved by either the Chinese 22d or 38th Divisions.

There was no artillery with, or in support of, the "Marauders". Each battalion was to depend upon its organic 60-mm, 81-mm mortars and .30 caliber heavy machine guns for supporting fire. (See Annex 1 -- Organization Chart) (54)

The Command Post of the 5307th Composite Unit (Provisional) was to be initially at PUP GA, and would displace forward when the three battalions had advanced to the vicinity of the objectives. (See Maps D and E) (55)

A command radio net was maintained which enabled the 5307th Composite Unit (Provisional) to have direct contact with each of the three battalions and with the six combat teams. This unusual arrangement gave isolated units direct access to the headquarters of the 5307th Composite Unit (Provisional) for the purpose of forwarding information or receiving orders when beyond range or out off from its immediate headquarters. Provision was also made for elements of the combat teams to have a similar direct access to the Command Group by SCR 536. Each battalion was provided with an AN/PRC-1 for communication with the supply base and an SCR-284 for contact with cargo and fighter planes. All units within

- (52) A-12, p. 35
- (53) A-18, p. 32-34
- (54) A-12, p. 15
- (55) A-18, p. 33, 34

battalions were equipped with SCR-300's. In addition to radio, mounted and foot messengers were to be used when necessary. No wire was to be used because of its weight and bulk.

A supply, ammunition and evacuation point (drop zone and air strip) was to be established in the forward area in the vicinity of LAGANG GA, by the 3d Battalion. (56) (57) (58) (59)

#### FINAL PREPARATIONS BEFORE CROSSING THE LINE OF DEPARTURE

On the afternoon of 2 March all three battalions were in a drop zone north of the TANAI River. Here at 1500 the 1st and 2d Battalions received three days rations, as well as grain, equipment and ammunition. The 3d Battalion, due to depart at 1600, had time to draw sufficient ammunition and equipment, but received only one day's ration before it moved out. (See Map F)

After drawing their quota the 1st and 2d Battalions crossed the TANAI River. They then proceeded by trail to the vicinity of the line of departure where they bivouacked.

#### NARRATION

##### THE ATTACK ON WALAWBUM (See Map F)

At 1650 on 2 March, the 3d Battalion in single file, preceded by its Intelligence and Reconnaissance Platoon, crossed the line of departure and made its way to the vicinity of SANA GA. Here the 3d Battalion established heavy security and bivouacked for the night.

In the early hours of 3 March, the 2d Battalion, the Command Group, and the 1st Battalion followed and by dawn all elements of the 5307th had crossed the line of departure.

- (56) A-12, p. 15
- (57) A-18, p. 29
- (58) A-12, p. 16, 37
- (59) A-18, p. 36

By mid-morning of the same day the 3d Battalion was rapidly moving toward its objectives over the trail and through the tangled underbrush. By 1100 it had passed through the hamlet of SABU GA, where the enemy withdrew before a shot was fired. At 1200 the 3d Battalion reported a sizable skirmish on the outskirts of LAGANG GA in which 50 Japanese were killed. Shortly after noon the 3d Battalion left LAGANG GA leaving Khaki Combat Team behind to commence work immediately upon the forward drop zone and air strip and to protect the rear of the battalion as it advanced toward WALAWBUM.

Despite almost continuous encounters with small enemy patrols the battalion then moved on without delay to the immediate vicinity of WALAWBUM. Here they quickly established two positions; one on a small knoll about 500 yards to the north of WALAWBUM and the other approximately 1,200 yards southeast of the village on high ground overlooking the eastern bank of the NUMPYEK River. As evening closed in the men prepared fox holes roofed with timber. Strong security forces were posted to guard the perimeter and patrols screened the area. (See Map F) (60) (61) (62)

After a day of cautious movement, the 2d Battalion aware that the area was alive with Japanese patrols, approached WESU GA.

Suddenly the trail blazed with fire as a small enemy patrol hidden by the dense foliage along the trail blasted at the lead scout. The scout dropped instantly to the ground. Two Japanese, believing him dead, rushed forward. As they did, he arose quickly from his prone position and fired, killing them both and routing the rest of the enemy patrol.

(60) A-11, p. 36  
(61) A-10, p. 280  
(62) A-17, p. 35



This incident further alerted the battalion and an attack formation was organized. Searching every tree and gully the unit continued the march toward WESU GA. However, the leading elements entered the village only to find it completely deserted.

The 2d Battalion, moved on through WESU GA, and halted about one mile west of the village. After organizing a strong perimeter defense the battalion dug in. (See Map F) (63) (64) (65)

The Command Group and the 1st Battalion proceeded along the trail to the vicinity of SABAW GA, where they halted. After putting out patrols and establishing road blocks they bivouacked. (66)

#### THE SECOND DAY AT WALAWBUM

On the morning of 4 March the Japanese, obviously confused and surprised by the unexpected and lightning-like advance of the "Marauders" searched the area with patrols, to determine the exact location and number of the unwelcome intruder. (67)

At dawn WALAWBUM and the road leading south were brought under mortar fire by the 3d Battalion. In a desperate effort to locate the source of this bombardment, the Japanese sent several patrols in the direction of the Orange Combat Team. Orange Combat Team, however, from its vantage point on the high ground used its machine guns to make the venture a costly one and killed 75 Japanese. (See Map F) (68)

From its position on the knoll overlooking WALAWBUM, the 3d Battalion's I&R Platoon was furnishing the 5307th with valuable information concerning the enemy's activities in the village.

- (63) A-12, p. 8
- (64) A-11, p. 36
- (65) A-17, p. 36
- (66) A-11, p. 37
- (67) A-10, p. 282
- (68) A-11, p. 38

However, the enemy early recognized the advantage this small hill gave the "Marauders" and at 0720 attacked the position from the north. The initial assault was quickly followed by jabs from the northeast and northwest.

Fortunately, a Japanese-American sergeant with the platoon was able to translate the loud orders shouted by the enemy. This enabled the platoon to meet each new direction of attack with automatic weapons fire.

As the morning progressed the attacks grew in violence. The platoon leader radioed the combat team commander and asked permission to direct mortar fire on the attackers. Permission was granted and shells commenced falling around the platoons perimeter. However, the enemy had practically surrounded the platoon and the combat team commander fearing the unit would be cut off from its parent organization ordered it to withdraw and join Orange Combat Team.

In compliance with this order the platoon withdrew across the river under cover of mortar fire and the platoon's own automatic weapons fire as well as a protective smoke screen. In the course of this action the platoon had accounted for 90 enemy dead and lost only one of its own men. (See Map F) (69) (70)

Meanwhile at 0900 Khaki Combat Team, in the vicinity of LAGANG GA air strip, was repulsing an enemy attack from the north. This enemy force, a patrol of about 30, was reinforced with a light machine gun and a knee mortar.

In the skirmish, the machine gunner whose fire lane covered the attackers route of approach, was wounded, but was promptly

(69) A-13, Sec 3, p. 1, 2  
(70) A-17, p. 38, 39

relieved by the assistant gunner. The assistant gunner had scarcely commenced firing when he too was wounded, but managed to continue fire. In the meantime the machine gun platoon leader had radioed back to the mortar section and was directing fire on the enemy. The combination of machine gun and mortar fire forced the enemy to withdraw leaving ten members of the enemy force dead. (See Map F) (71) (72)

After leaving WESU GA, the 2d Battalion hacked its way through the dense bamboo and by twilight had successfully reached the road without unduly alerting the enemy. By early evening of the same day the 2d Battalion had succeeded in building a road block on the KAMAING Road several miles west of WALAWBU. (See Map F)

The 2d Battalion's I&R Platoon also managed to tap a telephone line connecting the Japanese 18th Division Headquarters with the forward enemy forces. This wire tap supplied the "Marauders" with valuable information on the following day. (73)

Meanwhile, the 1st Battalion had constructed road blocks on the trail leading into LAGANG GA, and WESU GA, at NICHEH GA, and SANA GA. Patrols from the 1st Battalion were covering the rear area from NINGHKN GA to the rear of General Merrill's Command Post and forward in the vicinity of LAGANG GA. These patrols met little resistance. (See Map F) (74)

In spite of the patrolling twice during the day individual Japanese soldiers managed to get within firing distance of the command post. The first time, a Japanese machine gunner was

(71) A-12, p. 9

(72) A-11, p. 37

(73) A-11, p. 37, 38

(74) A-17, p. 40

spotted on the WALAWBUM Trail calmly placing his gun in position about one hundred yards from the Command Post. He was quickly driven off. Later, about fifty yards from the Command Post a lone Jap soldier was discovered. This enemy intruder was also driven away. (See Map F) (75)

As the shroud-like jungle night cloaked WALAWBUM the village grew strangely silent. The enemy was quiet. There were no sounds by which to gauge his movements nor anticipate his actions.

The three battalions dug in after putting out strong security and prepared for another long night.

#### THE THIRD DAY AT WALAWBUM

It is well to examine the Japanese situation on the morning of 5 March. WALAWBUM was virtually surrounded. The enemy's main supply route was blocked in two places, to the west by the 2d Battalion and to the south by the fire of the 3d Battalion. To the east another element of the 3d Battalion stood guard. The possible escape routes toward the north were sealed off by road blocks of the 1st Battalion and the area in between was under patrol. Although quiet during the night of 4-5 March, the enemy was far from silent or inactive on the morning of the 5th. (See Map G) (76)

In the early hours of the day the 1st Battalion area was alive with small enemy parties making their way south toward WALAWBUM. The majority of these groups never reached the forward areas due to the alert "Marauder" patrols screening the jungles, the cleverly concealed ambushes and the fires covering the road blocks at NICHET GA and SANA GA. (77) (78)

(75) A-11, p. 38

(76) A-17, p. 41

(77) A-11, p. 40

(78) A-12, p. 10

In an effort to clear the southern exit from WALAWBUM the Japanese made several attempts to assault the positions of the 3d Battalion. These assaults were thrown back by heavy machine gun and mortar fire. About noon, the enemy commenced a relatively heavy mortar fire on the positions overlooking the NUMPYEK River. (See Map G)

Orange Combat Team replied to this fire with a continuous stream of mortar fire directed at the road to prevent the arrival of enemy reinforcements. The 3d Battalion was greatly aided by radio contact with planes which were able to bomb and strafe known enemy installations. (79) (80)

It was the 2d Battalion, however, that bore the brunt of the enemy's wrath. At dawn, a heavy rain of artillery poured down on 2d Battalion positions. It was evident that the enemy regarded the road block a major obstacle and was determined to blast the 2d Battalion out of control of this main avenue of approach to WALAWBUM. (See Map G)

This murderous shelling increased with the passing of each hour and by noon had doubled in intensity. The enemy, close on the heels of each preparation, assaulted the 2d Battalion's positions but were repulsed with great losses each time. (See Map G)

While subjected to this heavy shelling, messages intercepted by Sergeant Matsumoto's wire tap were being rapidly forwarded to General Merrill. These messages gave an indication of the reason for the violence of the attack on the 2d Battalion's position. One message provided information that the enemy was frantically screaming for reinforcements and another ordered a general withdrawal.

(79) A-11, p. 41  
(80) A-17, p. 42

In spite of its fighting spirit and proven ability to withstand the shelling and repeated assaults of the enemy, the 2d Battalion was in poor shape by early evening. It was cut off from all sources of supply. Planes were unable to drop supplies because of the artillery fire. The unit was short of food and water and ammunition was practically exhausted.

At 1700, a message intercepted by the 2d Battalion revealed that the Japanese intended to attack the units position at 2300. Unable to supply the 2d Battalion with the ammunition necessary to withstand the attack General Merrill ordered it to withdraw at once toward WESU GA and join the 3d Battalion in the vicinity of LAGANG GA.

Upon receipt of this order from General Merrill the 2d Battalion withdrew. By 2300 it was cautiously making its way over the trail to the rear of their position. Progress was doubly slow because of the booby traps placed along the route by the 2d Battalion on the previous day. (See Map G) (81) (82)

During the day of 5 March the 1st Battalion continued to stand guard over its road blocks on the trails leading to WALAWBUM. The patrols of this organization screened the rear area and prevented any large scale infiltration of enemy troops from the north. (See Map G) (83)

The "Marauders" were alert throughout the night of 5-6 March. The rumble of trucks steadily flowing into WALAWBUM gave indication that the enemy would make a violent effort in the morning to clear WALAWBUM of the 5307th Composite Unit (Provisional)

(81) A-11, p. 40

(82) A-17, p. 40, 41

(83) A-11, p. 42

and make the route of withdrawal safe for the troops being pushed by the 22d and 38th Divisions. The noise and clatter was ominous evidence of preparations of an impending attack. (84)

To meet this anticipated "all out" attack believed due in the morning, the "Marauders" roofed their fox holes to withstand shelling and mentally braced themselves for the worst.

#### THE FOURTH DAY AT WALAWBUM

At about 0700 on the morning of 6 March, the 1st Battalion moved to the rear of General Merrill's Command Post which had moved to the vicinity of LAGANG GA. (See Map G) (85) (86)

The Japanese, now aware of the air strip's location, apparently realizing this was the life blood of the 5307th Composite Unit (Provisional), started shelling the air strip early in the day. Their fire was accurate and shells plowed into the air strip all day. Due primarily to their training and the air drop standard operating procedure the men of the 3d Battalion acted without hesitation and filled the shell holes almost as rapidly as they were made. This enabled planes to bring in much needed supplies and evacuate the wounded without a single loss. (See Map G) (See Air Drop SOP) (87) (88)

By 1200 the 2d Battalion, after a night of slow, torturous marching, had reached WESU GA, and were resupplied with one unit of greatly needed ammunition. The men were fed and the 2d Battalion moved rapidly toward LAGANG GA, where they were to reinforce the 3d Battalion. (See Map G) (89)

(84) A-11, p. 42

(85) A-17, p. 42

(86) A-12, p. 12

(87) A-17, p. 4, 13

(88) A-11, p. 43

(89) A-11, p. 40, 41

In the zone of the 3d Battalion, action had started simultaneously with the first light of morning. The 3d Battalion's Khaki Combat Team was ordered to pull out of positions at the LAGANG GA air strip and move through the jungle to reinforce the south flank of Orange Combat Team. This was to insure that the exit from WALAWBUM would be securely blocked. (See Map G) (90)

While beads of moisture were still on the lush green foliage, artillery shells started falling on the position held by the Orange Combat Team. The artillery screamed overhead and beat upon the log-roofed fox holes. The air was filled with the weird cry of the shells in flight and the earth shook with the impact of each shell.

The Orange Combat Team Commander, Major Lew, ordered his men to hold all fire, except that of the mortars. No other weapons were to open up until the enemy was within 25 to 40 yards of the team's positions. (See Map G)

In view of what happened later, it is well to look behind this order and examine Major Lew's reasoning. He obviously knew that after many unsuccessful attempts to pinpoint the positions by patrols on the day prior the enemy still was unaware of the exact location of Orange Combat Team. The enemy was anxious to know the location of the heavy machine guns and would use any ruse to make the team disclose its position by fire. (91) (92) (93)

The continuous and nerve shattering rain of artillery was returned by mortars alone, since it was difficult for the enemy to determine whether the shells falling on the road were from the vicinity of Orange Combat Team or some distant support element.

- (90) A-11, p. 43
- (91) A-12, p. 12
- (92) A-17, p. 45
- (93) A-12, p. 15



In Orange Combat Team's Mortar Section, observation presented a difficult problem. This was solved by Sgt Pung, who climbed a tall tree where he could observe the actions of the enemy and from this observation post, directed fire by means of his SCR-536. When the enemy attempted to assault the southern flank of Orange Combat Team, Pung's fire direction was so accurate the attack was virtually stillborn. Some of the shells landed in the midst of reinforcements brought up to aid in the assault and hit them as they detrucked. So effective was this fire direction and consequent fire that the enemy was forced ultimately to launch his attack from another direction. (See Map G) (94) (95)

Mortar fire was the one relief for the taunt nerved men of Orange Combat Team. The kunai grass and the leafy vegetation lay battered on their positions. They could see nothing to their front and could hear nothing except the steady explosion of artillery. The anticipated attack was long in coming and even the bravest were anxious and fretful, but they held their fire.

And then at last -- almost with a sigh of relief, they saw the Japanese approaching. Under cover of artillery, mortar and small arms fire the enemy was moving from the west in the direction of the river. (See Map G)

At 1715 the Japs closed in on the position. Two companies, one reinforced, were approaching in a line of skirmishes. Orders were shouted, and the enemy seemed whipped to a frenzy for this attack. They moved 100 yards from the Orange Combat Team's position, but received no fire. (96)

(94) A-12, p. 12

(95) A-11, p. 45

(96) A-12, p. 14

The men of Orange Combat Team watched them move in yard by yard, step by step. They saw them near the banks of the river, watched them move to within 60 yards and then slowly cover another 10 yards. The atmosphere was tense.

The Japanese commenced shouting. They screamed as though half-crazed by a fanatical desire to take the position. Slowly they moved forward until they reached the waters edge.

Suddenly, Orange Combat Team opened fire. The air was thick with flying lead. The fire of heavy machine guns swept macheti-like across the river bank. All the weapons so long silent filled the area with their deafening and deadly fires.

The enemy continued advancing, but fell almost as fast as he moved forward. Bodies tumbled into the river until the water was scarlet. The main attack started to falter. The enemy attempted to strike at each flank but was repulsed by the same accurate fires. For one hour the enemy tried again and again to reach Orange Combat Team's position. Time after time they threw troops into the attack, only to have them fall back. (97) (98)

At about 1815, the "Marauders" fire forced the numbed, confused enemy to retreat under cover of artillery, leaving 400 of his original force dead.

At 2200 the artillery fire ceased and all was quiet. The crushed Kunai grass gleamed crimson in the moonlight and the river gurgled impatiently over the dam of bodies blocking its passage south.

The 3d Battalion had succeeded in breaking the last serious enemy resistance in WALAWBUM. This was the signal for a general withdrawal of the enemy southward. (See Map G) (99) (100) (101)

- (97) A-11, p. 45, 46
- (98) A-12, p. 14, 15
- (99) A-17, p. 42, 43
- (100) A-10, p. 282
- (101) A-17, p. 43

At 1615, General Merrill received word that the 38th Chinese Division was on its way to relieve the 5307th Composite Unit (Provisional). For a time it had seemed that the Japanese would reinforce and make a determined stand at WALAWBUM. The success of the 3d Battalion had reversed this situation and heralded the withdrawal of the enemy. (See Map G) (102)

Word was received that the Japanese main body was being pursued south of WALAWBUM by the 22d Chinese Division and the 38th Chinese Division was to arrive in the morning to relieve the "Marauders". This combination of circumstances enabled General Merrill to withdraw the 3d Battalion from its forward position leaving the 2d Battalion in the vicinity of LAGANG GA. By 2400 the 3d Battalion had withdrawn from its positions and was on its way to WESU GA. (See Map G) (103) (104)

#### THE FIFTH DAY AT WALAWBUM

Throughout the early hours of 7 March the area was full of Japanese struggling, on trail and through the jungle, to reach their retreating units. The "Marauders" were doubly alert. (See Map G)

There was some Jap artillery fire in the early hours, but this was of short duration. (105)

At 0700 elements of the 38th Chinese Division entered WESU GA meeting only slight, discontinuous resistance and by evening were in control of WALAWBUM.

By late afternoon a joint perimeter defense was established and the "Marauders" and the Chinese were celebrating their combined victory.

(102) A-10, p. 283

(103) A-11, p. 46

(104) A-11, p. 46, 47

(105) A-11, p. 46

At 1530 all three battalions of the 5307th Composite Unit (Provisional) were in WESU GA where the organization was resupplied. (See Map G)

General Merrill, at a staff meeting at 1845 on the evening of 7 March 1944 said: "The first phase of our operation is over. \*\*\*\* Between us and the Chinese we have forced the Japs to withdraw further in the last three days than they have in three months of fighting. Our new mission will be made known to us soon. Please convey to your men General Stilwell's and my congratulations for a fine piece of work. Get rested and re-equipped as soon as possible and be ready to move on our next operation in three days." (106) (107)

To summarize the results of this action: The "Marauders" succeeded, through their attack on WALAWBUM, in preventing the enemy from moving supplies and reinforcements to MAINCKWAN and held up the Japanese withdrawal in the area long enough to permit the 22d and 38th Chinese Divisions to maintain close contact with the enemy. This combination made possible the accomplishment of the mission. (108)

Viewed from any angle, the operation was a complete success. The 5307th had, by engaging the enemy at WALAWBUM, prevented the enemy from successfully reinforcing his troops at MAINCKWAN as well as those in WALAWBUM. The action surprised and confused the enemy. Enemy battle losses totaled 800 dead, which compared to the "Marauders" total of 8 dead and 37 wounded, is an indication that the enemy defense of WALAWBUM was costly. It is well

(106) A-11, p. 46-48

(107) A-10, p. 282, 283

(108) A-18, p. 7

to note however, that the jungle caused the evacuation of about 250 Americans with malaria, fevers, psychoneuroses and other illnesses. (109) (110)

The action presented evidence that this type of operation was especially well suited to jungle terrain and the conditions imposed by a seasoned enemy.

This is best expressed by General Sun Li-jen, Commanding General, 38th Division (Chinese) who said of the "Marauders": "Frontal attack is no way to defeat the Japs. In this case the long way around is a short cut." (111)

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

##### 1. SUPPLY AND EVACUATION

The life blood of the entire operation at WALAWBUM was the supplies dropped by air. Wheeled vehicles could not be used because of the absence of roads in the combat zones. The air drop standard operating procedure used by the "Marauders" enabled them to maintain the forward airstrip and drop zone at LAGANG GA even under enemy fire. It is felt, however, that some provision for a supply and ammunition point should have been made in the area of the 1st Battalion. Had such a supply point been provided, hand carry or mule pack loads might have prevented the withdrawal of the 3d Battalion's Intelligence and Reconnaissance Platoon on 4 March. It is likewise possible that the withdrawal of the 2d Battalion on the evening of 6 March could have been avoided had such a system been in effect. It is true the booby trapped route of approach to the 2d Battalion's position would have

(109) A-17, p. 45

(110) A-18, p. 10

(111) A-11, p. 49

made this difficult, but not impossible. Evacuation presented no real problem as battle casualties were light and were quickly moved out by liaison plane from LAGANG GA.

308 2. COMMUNICATIONS

The 5307th Composite Unit (Provisional) was almost entirely dependent upon radio since messengers, the only other practical means of communication, were slow and subject to ambush. The arrangement whereby small front-line units had direct access to General Merrill's headquarters proved its value. On 5 March the 2d Battalion's Intelligence and Reconnaissance Platoon kept General Merrill abreast of the enemy's actions and orders. By this means General Merrill received word of the planned enemy night attack of the 2d Battalion. He was aware of their ammunition shortage and therefore ordered them to withdraw. The prompt skilled use of radio thus prevented what might otherwise been a costly attack. This system prevented the garbling of message by passage through many headquarters and indicated a knowledge of proper radio procedure by individuals within small units. The value of proper radio procedure was again illustrated by the action of the platoon leader of Kahki Combat Team's Intelligence and Reconnaissance Platoon, 3d Battalion. On 3 March he contacted the 81-mm mortar section by radio. He then directed the mortar fire which forced the enemy to withdraw from the vicinity of the LAGANG GA air strip. This is only one of many indications that small unit leaders were thoroughly familiar with the use of radio. These planes were directed to bring fire on enemy mortars that had been shelling Orange Combat Team, 3d Battalion. In this operation the air-ground communication system provided invaluable aid from fighter planes. Despite the thick screening foliage

and damp climate the radios functioned well. This indicates that signal corps radios will operate when used properly in jungle terrain. The application of proper radio procedure was one of the strong features of this operation and indicates that radio procedure should be made an integral part of the training of all units preparing to engage in an operation of this type.

### 3. INTELLIGENCE

The use of bilingual Japanese-Americans in the forward echelons provided the 5307th Composite Unit (Provisional) with its most accurate and reliable source of intelligence. The wisdom of the use of these soldiers in the front lines is amply illustrated by the wire tap used by Sgt Matsumoto in the 2d Battalion on 4-5 March. Through this medium it was possible not only to provide a quick and accurate appraisal of the enemy's future plans, but an actual translation of enemy orders as they were given. Again this point is illustrated by the Japanese-American sergeant in the 3d Battalion's Intelligence and Reconnaissance Platoon who was able on 4 March to provide his platoon leader with rapid translations of attack orders. Thus the unit met and repelled each attack. Much of the success of this action was due to these bilingual Americans. Their aptitude for converting shouts, meaningless to the average front-line soldier, into usable information saved many lives.

### 4. LACK OF ARTILLERY

While it is recognized that the means to convey artillery field pieces in the conventional manner was absent during this action, a means should have been provided. It is possible that on 5 March the 2d Battalion would not have been withdrawn had the unit been supported by artillery. The shelling of the vital

LAGANG GA airstrip could possibly have been prevented had there been fire support of sufficient range to knock out or divert the enemy artillery. It would seem that pack artillery could have been used and thus provided the necessary heavy fire support. 60-mm and 81-mm mortars were used to good advantage during the entire action and caused a number of casualties, but they did not possess sufficient range or fire power to strike deep into enemy positions. Although the operation was not supported well logistically for reasons given earlier in the body of this monograph, it was an oversight on the part of the planners not to have provided artillery. The planners should have considered the feasibility of delivering artillery pieces by air drop. Had artillery been available the entire action might have been shortened and casualties inflicted on the enemy even greater.

##### 5. FIRE DISCIPLINE

The success of Orange Combat Team, 3d Battalion, in repelling the Japanese assault of their positions in the action of 6 March was due entirely to fire discipline. The enemy had long had tremendous success in the use of "Snap" tactics. By this is meant the ability to so unnerve his opponent that he fires at imaginary targets for no other reason than to relieve the strain of waiting for the enemy to show himself. The technique used by the commander of this team is one worthy of considerable study. The tension of waiting for the impending attack was partially relieved by the firing of mortars. By waiting until the enemy was within sight and killing distance much ammunition was saved and positions were not disclosed. It must be pointed out, however, that fire discipline of the nature referred to may not



work as well with green troops as it does with seasoned troops. It is possible that the strain would produce an excessive number of psychiatric cases. Fire discipline is of great importance in jungle operations.

#### 6. SPEED AND SURPRISE

A major element in the success of the 5307th Composite Unit (Provisional) attack on WALAWBUM was the combination of speed and surprise. By approaching the objective indirectly through the enemy's left flank and away from all enemy installations the 5307th Composite Unit (Provisional) was able to keep its presence practically unknown. The few patrols encountered were almost all destroyed and few enemy remained to convey any information of the "Marauders" movements to the enemy headquarters. The enemy's failure to adequately outpost the route used by the "Marauders", his under-estimation of the Allied capabilities, and the speed with which the "Marauders" moved, prevented the enemy from learning the exact size, or location of the 5307th Composite Unit (Provisional). This combination resulted in the surprise so essential to the success of the operation. The enemy's failure to have a perimeter defense around the village of WALAWBUM was another factor taken advantage of by the "Marauders" which resulted in surprise. On 6 March the successful stand made by Orange Combat Team, 3d Battalion was due primarily to the inability of the enemy to locate its position. By withholding fire they were able to surprise the enemy. On 3 March the 3d Battalion took advantage of the enemy's confusion and moved rapidly into position before the enemy was completely aware of the units presence. The speed and caution with which the 5307th Composite Unit (Provisional) moved, plus the ability of its

elements to rapidly get into position enabled them to bring fire upon the enemy before the enemy was aware of their presence. The physical condition and endurance of the individual soldier is in reality the key to this type action. Without adequate training this unit could not have maintained its pace. It is doubtful that surprise would have been achieved had the enemy been more alert.

#### 7. FIRE DIRECTION

The 5307th Composite Unit (Provisional) was without artillery support. Each combat team depended upon its organic heavy weapons, particularly 81-mm mortars, for long range fire. Due to the terrain each unit was comparatively isolated from its support weapons. These units were therefore dependent upon the accuracy of fire direction by radio. In most instances the accuracy and promptness of long range fire support was the responsibility of small unit leaders. On 4 March, the ability of the platoon leader, Intelligence and Reconnaissance Platoon, Orange Combat Team to direct mortar fire by radio proved exceedingly valuable. His accurate fire direction brought a cover of 81-mm mortar fire and smoke which made possible the successful withdrawal of his platoon from an untenable position. On 6 March Sgt Pung, Mortar Section, Orange Combat Team directed highly accurate fire on the enemy by the use of his SCR 536. This fire repulsed enemy attempts to assault the south flank of the team's position. In each instance the safety and success of the unit was due to a small unit leader's ability to accurately and properly direct fire. In jungle warfare units are frequently separated from all direct contact with their supporting mortars. It is essential

in this type terrain that small unit leaders be capable of directing fire by radio.

#### LESSONS

1. All operational plans should contain complete logistical support to meet any contingency.
2. All ground force personnel should be taught proper radio procedure.
3. Bilingual soldiers should be assigned to front-line units.
4. Mobile ground force units operating on jungle terrain should be provided organic light artillery.
5. Fire discipline should be a feature of basic infantry training.
6. Advantage gained by surprise should be promptly capitalized upon by the rapid movement of units to their objectives.
7. Fire direction by radio should be an integral part of the training of every small unit leader.